

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6014

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MANAGUA 1217

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PINS, PINR, NU, SHUM
SUBJECT: STATUS REPORT ON SOMOZA'S INITIATIVES

SUMMARY: PRESIDENT SOMOZA HAS TAKEN SEVERAL INITIATIVES TOWARD PACIFYING THE OPPOSITION WHICH, SINCE THE ASSASSINATION OF PEDRO JOAQUIN CHAMORRO, HAS BECOME HIGHLY POLARIZED AND DEDICATED TO OUSTING SOMOZA NOW. SOME OF THE INITIATIVES CORRESPOND TO ISSUES WHICH HAD EARLIER BEEN DEMANDED BY THE OPPOSITION. OTHERS WERE THE IDEAS OF SOMOZA AND HIS ADVISORS AND DESIGNED TO OBTAIN SUPPORT FROM CERTAIN SECTORS. TO DATE THE OPPOSITION, WHICH COMPRISES DIVERSE POLITICAL, LABOR AND PRIVATE SECTOR ELEMENTS AND PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS, HAS NOT ACCEPTED AS CONSTRUCTIVE ANY OF THE INITIATIVES. THIS REACTION IS PRIMARILY ROOTED IN A DEEP-SEATED BELIEF THAT SOMOZA CANNOT BE TRUSTED REGARDLESS OF WHAT HE SAYS OR APPEARS TO BE DOING. END SUMMARY

1. ON FEB 26, SOMOZA PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED FOR THE FIRST TIME HIS INTENTION TO RETURN TO PRIVATE LIFE AT THE END OF HIS TERM. THIS STATEMENT WHICH SPECIFICALLY INCLUDED DROPPING HIS CONTROL OF THE NATIONAL GUARD (GN) ADDRESSED THE CONCERN OF THE OPPOSITION THAT SOMOZA MIGHT TRY TO RETAIN THE PRESIDENCY THROUGH SOME CONSTITUTIONAL TRICKERY OR PERHAPS EVEN A COUP AS WELL AS THEIR BELIEF THAT SOMOZA WOULD CONTINUE TO RULE THE COUNTRY AS CHIEF DIRECTOR OF THE GN. BE-
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CAUSE THE OPPOSITION DOES NOT TRUST SOMOZA, THEIR REACTION IS THAT THERE STILL IS NO GUARANTEE THAT HE WILL COMPLY WITH HIS DECLARED INTENT. THERE IS ALSO THE BELIEF THAT THE RESULTS OF THE NEXT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION WOULD BE FAR MORE FAVORABLE IF IT OCCURRED WHEN SOMEONE OTHER THAN SOMOZA WERE IN THE PRESIDENCY. THE OPPOSITION HAS SUGGESTED THAT AS A DEMONSTRATION OF HIS INTENTIONS, SOMOZA SHOULD RESIGN NOW HIS POSITION AS CHIEF DIRECTOR OF THE GN. IT IS

NOT LIKELY SOMOZA WOULD ACCEPT THIS DEMAND DURING THE CURRENT CIVIL STRIFE AND ACTIVE INSURGENCY, BUT HE HAS NOT COMMENTED ON THIS ISSUE. SUCH A STEP COULD HAVE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON OPPOSITION THINKING.

2. SOMOZA HAS ANNOUNCED A COMMITMENT TO HAVING JUSTICE REALIZED IN THE CHAMORRO ASSASSINATION CASE. THIS HAS BEEN A KEY OPPOSITION DEMAND. THE GON INVITED AN OBSERVER FROM THE I-A PRESS ASSOCIATION WHICH THE IAPA REJECTED. IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT AN OBSERVER MISSION WOULD HAVE HAD ANY SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON ATTITUDES OR ON THE INVESTIGATION. ON FEB 26 SOMOZA ANNOUNCED HE WOULD ESTABLISH A NATIONAL COMMISSION TO REVIEW THE CHAMORRO ASSASSINATION INVESTIGATION. ON MARCH 10 HE STATED HE WOULD ASK MIN. GOV. MORA TO SET UP THE COMMISSION. TO DATE NOTHING CONCRETE HAS HAPPENED IN THE INVESTIGATION TO UNCOVER THE AUTHOR(S) OF THE CRIME WHICH OCCURRED TWO MONTHS AGO. THE PROBLEM IN THE ASSASSINATION INVESTIGATION MAY BE THAT THE ONLY SIGNIFICANT WITNESS(ES) MAY BE IN THE U.S. AND NOT EXTRADITABLE. IF THIS IS THE CASE, THE ASSASSINATION INVESTIGATION MAY NEVER BE SATISFACTORILY COMPLETED. THE U.S. LAWYER FOR DR. RAMOS, WHO HAS BEEN INDICTED FOR THE ASSASSINATION, TOLD EMBOFF HIS CLIENT MAY BE WILLING TO MAKE DEPOSITIONS FROM MIAMI BUT IS UNWILLING TO VOLUNTARILY RETURN TO NICARAGUA.

3. ON FEB 26 SOMOZA ANNOUNCED HIS INTENTION TO OPEN UP THE POLITICAL PROCESS BY MAKING IT EASIER FOR OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES TO PARTICIPATE. THE LIBERAL PARTY INTRODUCED IN THE CONGRESS PARTIAL AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION TO THIS EFFECT. THE CHANGES WOULD: A) END THE CONFIDENTIAL

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CONSERVATIVE PARTY'S 40 PERCENT AUTOMATIC CONGRESSIONAL REPRESENTATION AND REPRESENTATION IN GOVERNMENTAL AND AUTONOMOUS ENTITIES; B) PROVIDE FOR OTHER MINORITY PARTY REPRESENTATION IN THE CONGRESSIONAL LEADERSHIP AND IN THE ELECTORAL TRIBUNALS; AND C) REMOVE THE ELECTORAL LAW FROM THE CONSTITUTION SO IT CAN BE MORE EASILY AMENDED TO IMPLEMENT THIS INITIATIVE. THE OPPOSITION HAS VARYING REACTIONS TO THIS INITIATIVE. THE OPPOSITION HAS VARYING REACTIONS TO THIS INITIATIVE WHICH THEY CONCEDE IS THE FIRST TANGIBLE MANIFESTATION OF SOMOZA'S ACTION ON A LONG-STANDING GRIEVANCE. THE OPPOSITIONISTS ARE UNANIMOUS THAT THE CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM IN ITSELF IS NOT ENOUGH BECAUSE IT ALLOWS FOR THE MAJORITY PARTY (WHICH THEY SEE TO BE THE LIBERAL IN THE NEXT ELECTION) TO CONTROL THE ELECTION PROCESS, THEREFORE, THE LIBERALS CAN PERPETUATE THEIR POLITICAL POWER THROUGH FRAUD. THEY ALSO SEE A DANGER IN REMOVING THE ELECTORAL LAW FROM THE CONSTITUTION AS THIS MAKES IT EASIER AND QUICKER TO AMEND, WHICH THEY VIEW AS AN OPEN DOOR TO SUBSEQUENT MANIPULATION BY SOMOZA. FURTHER THEY WANT TO HAVE AN IDEA OF THE NATURE OF SOMOZA'S INTENTIONS IN THE ELECTORAL LAW REFORM BEFORE THEY ACCEPT THE CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM. WHERE THE OPPOSITION HAS HAD DIFFERENCES IS OVER WHETHER THEY SHOULD MAKE AN EFFORT TO ADDRESS THESE CONCERNS IN A COUNTER-INITIATIVE OR SHOULD SIMPLY WASH THEIR HANDS OF THE ENTIRE PROPOSAL LEAVING TO SOMOZA THE RESPONSIBILITY

FOR UNILATERAL ACTION. THE OFFICIALLY RECOGNIZED CONSERVATIVES ARE FOR A COUNTER-PROPOSAL, BUT THE UDEL COALITION AND OTHER SPLINTER PARTIES WERE RELUCTANT TO AGREE (PARTLY BECAUSE THEY WERE UNCOMFORTABLE WITH THE CONSERVATIVES DEFENDING THEIR INTERESTS AND PARTLY BECAUSE THEY SEE A COUNTER-PROPOSAL AS THE EQUIVALENT OF INITIATION OF RENEWED DIALOGUE WHICH THEY FEEL IS AS YET NOT APPROPRIATE)

EMB UNDERSTANDS THAT ON FEB 13, AGREEMENT WAS REACHED TO GO AHEAD WITH THE COUNTER-PROPOSAL. SOMOZA SAID IN HIS MARCH 10 PRESS CONFERENCE THAT THE DETAILS OF THE ELECTORAL REFORM INITIATIVE ARE NEGOTIABLE.

4. SOMOZA ANNOUNCED ON FEB 26 HE WOULD TAKE AN INITIATIVE TO ADVANCE FREE TRADE UNIONISM BY REMOVING THE GOVERNMENT FROM PASSING ON THE

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MERITS OF EACH APPLICATION FOR OFFICIAL RECOGNITION. THE SOCIAL CHRISTIAN AND SOCIALIST LABOR CONFEDERATIONS LABELED THIS MOVE AS TRICKER AND REJECTED IT. THE POLITICAL OPPOSITION HAS ARGUED SOMOZA COULD SHOW HIS INTENTIONS BY APPROVING CURRENTLY PENDING PETITIONS

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FOR RECOGNITION, AND IS LIKELY TO BE SUSPICIOUS OF THE NEW PROPOSAL UNTIL THEY SEE THE PROPOSED LABOR LAW REVISION. A POTENTIAL PROBLEM WITH THIS INITIATIVE IS THAT IT APPARENTLY WOULD REMOVE SOME PROTECTION FOR OFFICIALLY RECOGNIZED UNIONS AGAINST RIVAL MANAGEMENT-ORGANIZED AND SUPPORTED ORGANIZATIONAL EFFORTS. IN DISPUTES,

THE LABOR MINISTRY WOULD, THEREFORE, APPARENTLY GAIN FLEXIBILITY IN DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS FROM RIVAL FACTIONS.

5. SOMOZA'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE INITIATIVES IN LAND SALE GUARANTEES, A CODE FOR RENTOR-LESSEE RELATIONS, AND A TAX POLICY CHANGE ON IDLE LAND HAD BEEN IN THE GESTATION STAGE FOR SOME TIME AS A RESULT OF A STUDY OF CHANGES WHICH WOULD PERMIT IMPROVED CONDITIONS OF LAND TENANCY IN WHICH AID PARTICIPATED. IN FACT, TWO OF THE INITIATIVES WERE BASED ON PRIOR AGREEMENT FOR CONTINUATION OF US PARTICIPATION IN THE INVIERNO PROGRAM. THE OPPOSITION REACTION WAS TWO-FOLD: A) THE IDLE LAND TAX INITIATIVE WAS A REPRISAL AGAINST MEDIUM AND SMALL FARMERS--THIS REACTION IGNORES THE FACT THAT THERE IS AN EXEMPTION FOR SMALL LAND HOLDERS, AND THE WEALTHIEST LANDOWNERS ARE THE ONES WHO ARE MOST LIKELY TO UNDER-UTILIZE THEIR LAND AND BE FORCED TO THINK ABOUT SELLING THE EXCESS TO OTHERS; AND B) THE INITIATIVES ARE NOT TRUE AGRARIAN REFORM IN THAT THEY DIDN'T CONTEMPLATE BREAKING UP LARGE LAND HOLDINGS AND DISTRIBUTING PARCELS TO POOR FARMERS. THE COUNTER ARGUMENT IS THAT THE INITIATIVES ARE EXACTLY SO DESIGNED IN THAT THE LARGE LANDHOLDERS WILL BE PRES-

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SURED TO RENT OR SELL UNUSED LAND TO POOR FARMERS AND, IF THEY WANT TO SELL, THE GUARANTEE PROPOSAL WILL GIVE THE SELLERS CONFIDENCE THEY WILL BE PAID.

6. THE OTHER SOCIAL WELFARE PROPOSALS REGARDING EXTENDING SOCIAL SECURITY COVERAGE AND MAKING MANDATORY THE 13TH MONTH BONUS HAVE BEEN CHALLENGED ONLY IN THAT THERE ARE DOUBTS THAT THEY CAN BE ACHIEVED IN THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS STRAINED RESOURCES FOR PROVIDING THE BENEFITS AND THAT THEY ARE AN ECONOMIC REPRISAL IN THAT THE EMPLOYER HAS TO PAY THE BENEFIT. THERE HAS BEEN NO POPULAR REACTION OF SUPPORT FROM THE INTENDED BENEFICIARIES WHO BY NATURE ARE SKEPTICAL UNTIL THEY HAVE A BIRD IN HAND. SOMOZA, IN ANSWER, SAID IN HIS MARCH 10 PRESS CONFERENCE THAT FUNDS WERE AVAILABLE THROUGH INTERNATIONAL LENDING AND THAT THE SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM WOULD BE EXTENDED TO TWO DEPARTMENTS THIS YEAR AND THE REST OF THE COUNTRY THE FOLLOWING YEAR. HE HAD PREVIOUSLY OFFERED TO EXTEND SOCIAL SECURITY TO RURAL WORKERS IN HIS LABOR DAY SPEECH LAST MAY FIRST.

7. OTHER SOMOZA STATEMENTS THE EQUIVALENT OF INITIATIVES HAVE INCLUDED THE FACT HE WOULD ACCEPT IN A DIALOGUE POSITIVE SUGGESTIONS FOR RESTRUCTURING THE NATIONAL GUARD, AMNESTY FOR POLITICAL PRISONERS; THAT REFORM OF THE RADIO AND TV CODE HAD ALREADY BEEN ACCEPTED FOR STUDY IN THE CONGRESS, AND THAT HE WOULD ORDER A HALT TO THE PRACTICE OF BUSING PEOPLE LIKE CATTLE IN PICKUP TRUCKS TO MANAGUA'S POOR DISTRICTS. THE NEXT DAY LA PRENSA SAID THE DEGRADING BUSING PRACTICE CONTINUES. ON THIS AND THE OTHER PROMISES THE OPPOSITION PREDICTABLY AND UNDERSTANDABLY WILL WAIT FOR CONCRETE RESULTS.

8. IN THE AREA OF ATMOSPHERICS, SOMOZA HAS FOR THE FIRST TIME IN RE-

CENT MEMORY PUBLICLY ACKNOWLEDGED EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE BY THE GN,
AS ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE NATIONAL WORK STOPPAGE
BROKE NO LAWS, HAS REPEATEDLY DENIED THAT HE WOULD TAKE ANY REPRISALS
AGAINST OPPOSITION PRIVATE SECTOR LEADERS, AND HAS IMPLICITLY ACK-
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NOWLEDGED PUBLICLY THAT SOMOZA- FAMILY CONTROL OF THE GN HAS IM-
PEDED INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THAT ORGANIZATION AS WELL AS DEMOCRA-
TIZATION OF THE COUNTRY. THE OPPOSITION WOULD CHALK THESE STATEMENTS
TO PURE ATMOSPHERICS, CONCEDED UNDER PRESSURE AND DESIGNED PURELY
TO APPEASE THE U.S.

9. SOMOZA HAS CONTINUED TO PUBLICLY STATE SINCE HIS FEB 26 SPEECH
THAT HE SEEKS DIALOGUE WITH THE OPPOSITION. HIS SINCERITY IN ACCEPT-
ING TRUE CHANGE TOWARD DEMOCRATIZATION IS DOUBTED BY THE OPPOSITION
BECAUSE SOMOZA IN THE PAST HAS ALWAYS BENEFITED FROM THE DEALS HE
HAS STRUCK WITH THE OPPOSITION WHEN THE INTENT OF THE COMPROMISE HAS
NOT BEEN RESPECTED. THEY SEE THIS SITUATION AS EQUIVALENT TO THE
FLY ACCEPTING AN INVITATION FROM THE SPIDER. THIS LEADS THE OPPOSI-
TION TO FIND IT EASIER TO AGREE TO A COMMON POSITION THAT SOMOZA MUST
GO NOW THAN IT IS FOR THEM TO OBTAIN COMMON AGREEMENT ON HOW TO
RESPOND TO THE ANNOUNCED INITIATIVES. AT THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER,
MANY POLITICAL AND PRIVATE SECTOR OPPOSITIONISTS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT
THE GROWING SYMPATHY FOR THE FSLN GUERRILLAS AND OUTBREAKS OF VIO-
LENCE. THESE PEOPLE ARE WILLING TO CONSIDER DIALOGUE IF THEY ARE NOT
FORCED TO RUN THE RISK OF BEING SEEN AS BEING DRAWN IN BY SOMOZA.
THEIR WARINESS IS ONLY LIKELY TO BE SATISFIED IF THEY RESPOND TO THE
CALL TO A DIALOGUE BY AN OUTSIDE AGENT (E.G., THE CHURCH) AND WHEN
SOMOZA'S INITIATIVES ARE TRANSLATED INTO A SIGNIFICANT CONCRETE
DEMONSTRATION OF HIS WILLINGNESS TO SURRENDER POWER. TO DATE NEITHER
OF THESE CONDITIONS EXIST IN THEIR OPINION.
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